



**Remarkable Lives: Chantelle Garth in conversation with  
Jerome Carson.**

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**Title:** “Remarkable Lives: Chantelle Garth in conversation with Jerome Carson.”

**Authors:** Chantelle Garth and Jerome Carson.

**Abstract**

**Purpose** – *The purpose of this paper is to provide a profile of Chantelle Garth.*

**Design/methodology/approach** – *Using a case study approach, Chantelle provides a short account of her background and is then interviewed by Jerome.*

**Findings** – *Chantelle gives an account of her very troubled childhood and adolescence. Her adult life has been no easier. Life is a continuous challenge.*

**Research limitations/implications** – *It is hard to imagine a tougher life than Chantelle’s, yet her ambition has carried her through. A single account, yet one of the most powerful accounts in this series.*

**Practical implications** - *There are few better accounts of resilience in the face of at times what seem like insurmountable obstacles.*

**Social implications** – *The belief that can be instilled by a single professional can have a profound effect in encouraging someone facing adversity.*

**Originality/value** – *There are numerous accounts of individuals facing difficulties in life, then there is Chantelle’s. This is in a category of its own.*

**Keywords** *Resilience Child abuse Parenting Recovery Survival Role models*

**Paper type** *Case study*

**Introduction**

I remember meeting Chantelle in her first year. I was immediately struck by her sense of focus that blazed through her bright blue eyes. She was always a woman on a mission. Knowing something of her personal circumstances, I appreciated, though had little true comprehension of the struggles she faced. These difficulties persisted through her undergraduate years. She literally “barged” her way onto a Masters course in Counselling and Positive Psychology, so determined was she to follow her path. No doubt lots of people never believed her, when she said she was going to go to University.

Hers was a non-traditional University background. In terms of setbacks she reminds me of the Olympic boxing champion, Nicola Adams, *"Fall down eight times, get up nine."* I suspect she is going to spend her life proving people wrong, but I am getting ahead of myself. Let's hear in Chantelle's words how it all started for her...

### **Brief biography of Chantelle Garth**

I had a normal upbringing, if normal was defined as spending your childhood in pubs eating crisps and drinking coca cola or having to experience watching your uncle slice open your Mum's nose with a knife, and stabbing your Dad in the chest! Don't get me wrong, we'd have the two holidays a year (to Wales and abroad a couple of times), but me and my younger two sisters were a little more fortunate than others on the Langley estate I grew up on. I was always "the black sheep." The one head-to-toe with infected eczema. The one who was abused (aged seven up until 10). The abuser was my so-called Grandad (Mum's step mum's, brother in fact). Rumour had it he abused my Mum too. Mum always claimed he was cured by electric shock treatment, to justify why she sent me, her daughter, to a "paedophile's house." Dad wasn't to know. Too busy driving lorries around the country and driving taxis at night to keep the house together. Long story short, I was called a liar, and the so-called Grandad got away with it.

Dad was the glue. My glue anyway. Mum, she hated me. Why I'll never know, but it's how I grew up? It was normal to watch my sisters have all Mum's love and her grounding me down every opportunity she got, doing chores whilst my sisters were out with their mates. Throughout primary school I was always the "swot", however, when I got to high school, things went downhill. I found being a little tear-away was better than being a victim and I found myself pregnant at the age of 15. By this time Mum's a raging alcoholic (her addiction worsened after her own mum died). Mum loved to smack me and kick me out at every opportunity. Poor Dad used to finish work and come and get me from my

seven-mile walk to my partner’s Mum’s house, who I eventually moved in with, but that didn’t work so I moved back home.

I gave birth to my daughter aged 16, after 19 hours with my Mum pissed at the side of the bed while I was in labour. I was glad when it was over. I swore my daughter would never go through what I had. Five months later on February 8<sup>th</sup>., just 3 days before my 17<sup>th</sup> birthday, I woke to hear choking noises. I checked my baby, she was fine. So, I went into Mum’s room. There was blood dripping from her mouth. I rang an ambulance and I was told to follow, but after an argument because I didn’t send her vodka with her to hospital, she said, “If I die tonight it’s your fault”. I decided to go shopping with my daughter instead. At 6pm I received the call from my Dad. “She’s dead!” That’s all I heard. All I could think was, “It’s my fault - why didn’t I just give her the vodka?” She used to drink several litres a day. I spiralled. Dad was working, I had just become a mum myself at 16. I gained the responsibility of my mother’s role too. I met a guy, fell in with the wrong crowd and discovered what crack cocaine was. It just helped me forget but, in the end, I lost my daughter on the grounds of neglect, nine days before her second birthday, to Social Services. As horrid as it sounds, it made me who I am today, so I’m glad my life turned out that way.

Losing your daughter to Social Services is basically like your child dying. I’ll never forget the day she was taken from my arms by six policemen in Rochdale. After a 3-day bender on crack cocaine, I decided to sort my life out. I swore when I gave birth to her that she wouldn’t live a life like mine, yet she had no one to guide the way for her as a role model. It was my duty as her mother to become that role model. From my childhood to being a teenager, looking back, my life was always disadvantaged. Long story short, I was told in the court room, basically because I was abused, it was more than likely my girl would be abused in my care too, so I stepped down and agreed to let my girl live with her Dad’s father. I had to prove I was worthy to be her mum. I threw myself into parenting courses, found myself

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3 a job in a bar, however the guy I met who introduced me to crack, rang up threatening to stab me, so  
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5 the manager told me to leave. I was not allowed near him, because of the domestic violence. With  
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7 that, I replaced crack cocaine with alcohol and violence.  
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12 I then decided to see a counsellor called Bob Morrissey. He knew my background, he knew my  
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14 childhood and was first person to say *"I believe in you."* That's where my journey began. I gained  
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16 myself a voluntary position at Rochdale Connections Trust as a mentor under his guidance, and started  
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18 attending the local Sure Start centre to do my Maths and English. I then met my oldest two boy's dad  
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20 (another abusive relationship that ended terribly). After I completed the course I attended college,  
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22 doing Access Courses, level 2 & 3 and found myself in university. Me. I made it. I used to be sitting in  
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24 lectures and tears would roll down my cheeks because I couldn't believe it. That alone was a dream. I  
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26 then met my current partner (we live separately because I can't handle living with a man) and had two  
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28 more boys. I nearly lost my life carrying my second youngest and had to have my ovary removed at 28  
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30 weeks pregnant. That meant I had to ask for my first coursework extension in my third year of my  
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32 undergraduate degree. I started from the lowest qualification you can have, entry level one, and I am  
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34 now doing a Masters. Every grade spurred me on. Mum used to say I'd make nothing of myself. If only  
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36 she could see me now?  
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43 I started to believe in me. My relationship with my daughter was good, which given what I'd put her  
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45 through in her early years, I was grateful for. Lucky. Then my worst nightmare came true. She was 13  
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47 and was made pregnant by her so-called uncle. You can't put into words the feelings I felt. She had to  
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49 have a termination. She was too young. Watching your daughter go through something you've never  
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51 experienced, was gut-wrenching. I could relate to the rape, I could guide her. I found myself grieving  
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53 for what could have been my first potential grandchild. Anyway, the strain on my relationship took  
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3 hold and me and my partner split up. Still I plodded on. Graduation day was a very emotional day, but  
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5 I did it. I graduated with an upper second class honours degree.  
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10 I fell pregnant again. I couldn't go through with an abortion, so I kept him. That was hard. I didn't want  
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12 another baby, but I just couldn't abort him. I just went on autopilot and after giving birth I found myself  
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14 taking cocaine (not crack) again, it was the only way I knew how to deal with trauma. Addiction ran  
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16 through the family. Who was I kidding, I found myself in despair and alone? Cocaine took away  
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18 thoughts and gave me the energy to clean the house at night after mothering five kids, one of whom  
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20 has autism. After a good few weekends (that's when I'd take it, because I'd be busy all week with Uni,  
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22 but then the weekend came and all I could think about was this guy raping my girl and this baby). I  
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24 remembered a lady from Uni, Laura O'Brien giving a talk to my class back in year one and her struggle,  
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26 (O'Brien and Carson, 2016), so I reached out and sat and spoke to her in Uni and that was the start of  
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28 recovery.  
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34 I gained a place on the Masters' course in Counselling and Positive Psychology at Bolton and with all  
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36 this happening, I couldn't be more thankful for. Throughout the course I was able to roleplay  
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38 counselling sessions with a partner in class. I didn't have time to talk to anyone outside of Uni. I didn't  
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40 want to. I was too busy trying to stop myself drowning and then it became part of my course. I  
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42 had to deal with these problems instead of blocking them out. I've not looked back since. Don't get  
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44 me wrong I slipped a few times in the beginning, but I made it in the end and being the optimist I am,  
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46 I put in place things when temptation comes along. I have my Uni friend Zoe to turn to. She's helped  
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48 me through a lot.  
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### Chantelle in conversation with Jerome

Jerome: Do you feel you ever truly got to know your mother? She was clearly a very troubled soul herself.

Chantelle: I knew she liked garlic mushrooms and murder documentaries. That's about it. To be honest I never wanted to know who she was. The feeling of hatred was mutual. It was her fault. She could have protected me. She chose not to. She laid the foundations for my life. She could have prevented a lot. I thank her now. I often asked myself, because she was abused by the same guy, how did she deal with it? Was that the reason why she drank in the first place? Or was it because her mum was an alcoholic too? I think both answers are correct. She died 14 years ago, and I do not miss her as a person. I had to gain closure through gaining an understanding of how her life was, prior to giving birth to me, that helped me gain a rough understanding. The story did not come from my Mum herself, so I'm not sure if it's true?

Jerome: How important has the support of your father been over the years?

Chantelle: Immensely. I think I would have been dead if it were not for him. My Dad taught me perseverance. He never gave up on Mum. He tolerated years and years of abuse from her too. I think he believed she would recover from alcoholism, that the happier times may have flourished again. I have watched my Dad experience situations that could have easily toppled him over the edge, and he may have wobbled, but he never quit. When I started my journey in education, he used to scream the loudest for me. When everybody who saw I was going to try and make something of myself basically laughed, because things like gaining a highly qualified career were not possible for someone like me, because of the life I led. For the whole of my life, he stood up for me. I owe it to him.

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Jerome: You note that your life from your childhood to your teenage years was very disadvantaged. Do you not feel that your adult years have been equally disadvantaged?

Chantelle: Yes and no. Yes, because if I had a better role model for a mother, maybe I would not have turned to cocaine when life turned sour, because in the words of Albert Bandura, “Children see, children do,” and no because as an adult I make the decisions. I am the one who has control of my life. It is my job to not let my life be affected any more than what it already has been. I am firm believer in the law of attraction, regardless of what it is you are focusing on, it will come forth. Good or bad. I know there is no scientific evidence that supports this theory and it is viewed as pseudoscience. However, I came across Carol Dweck’s mindset theory, and thought that it was quite similar. Positive thoughts allow your mindset to “grow,” instead of being stuck in a “fixed” state. These positive thoughts make an individual happier in daily life, therefore, it is more likely you gain more positive outcomes as a result of the thought processes. If I can stay focused on what makes me happy, enjoy learning and be dedicated to my work, and think positive thoughts in relation to my grades and my goals in life, then what could go wrong? A lot to be honest, but at least I’d be smiling!

Jerome: How have you managed during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Chantelle: Five kids and a Masters’ degree to study. I do not know, but I have! Again, my mindset has a lot to do with it. I did nearly give up. Due to the pandemic and looking after five children alone, trying to find the time to do anything was exhausting. That played upon my mental health and I found myself in a depressed state of mind. Same things, day in day out. My motivation went with it. I’d just had my youngest son before lockdown, so the demands of a new born, two toddlers, a child with autism who is reliant on routine, then all of a sudden he has no routine, which resulted in meltdown after meltdown, and a bored 8 year old was more than challenging. Having six of us meant we all couldn’t get in the car and I became reliant on others, which left me feeling very isolated. When the daily



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3 chores were done and the kids were asleep, I was too exhausted to look at any work and thought  
4 maybe I should have listened to people when they told me to take a gap year, after the 8 years or so  
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6 I've been in education. I think I gained a sense of hopelessness. I did not like my thought processes,  
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8 so I downloaded a positive affirmation app called "I am," and my mood changed. I felt happier,  
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10 therefore, coped better and was able to get some work done. I had to defer two assignments which  
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12 has left me feeling a bit frustrated because every deadline is a step closer, but I am only human!  
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19 Jerome: What does the concept of hope mean for you?

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21 Chantelle: The concept of hope to myself is everything. I have put so much effort into trying to find  
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23 my true self, that the expectation of my dreams must come true. I have always hoped to become a  
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25 better version of my former self, I have always believed in me. From the day Bob Morrisey said "*You*  
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27 *can do this*," I knew I could and I think that is where the change happened within myself. Once I saw I  
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29 was able to do it, I believed a little bit more. There were many obstacles in my way, but I always found  
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31 a way round them. I'm unstoppable, and I won't stop until I achieve my need for self-gratification. If  
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33 anybody else can make it to the top, why not me? If anything, I think I deserve the amazing outcomes  
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35 which are to come out of my career. I do not specifically know where or what job title I will hold,  
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37 however, I do have a vision of who I am yet to become.  
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46 Jerome: What changes would you most like to see in mental health services?

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48 Chantelle: Fewer waiting times for people to see counsellors. My girl had to wait eight weeks to see  
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50 someone. I fully understand that there is a shortage of counsellors and funding, but in such  
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52 circumstances especially with young girls who are victims of rape, I think availability should be  
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54 immediate because their thoughts are! As that young girl who once used to go to sleep at night with  
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56 puffy eyes, self-harm marks on my arms and eyes red raw and stinging, because I cried so much as I  
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had so much to say, yet no one to say it to. That itself is a killer. As we all know, some peoples’ states of minds are not as “strong” as others, which results in them taking their lives or not dealing with it at all, which only leads to erratic behaviour. Speaking about trauma really does help, anything to divert the thought processes, the flashbacks, the physiological aftermath.

Jerome: What are your views on the use of medication for mental health problems?

Chantelle: if you can deal with your problems by talking, then do so. Do not take the medication unless you really need to. I am aware that in some circumstances this is unavoidable. I just personally feel that medication is just a block and for some of the side effects that come with the tablets, it should be prescribed more carefully. My personal view is the medication plays with your neurons to make you feel better, and once you feel better you cannot just stop taking them, you have to be weaned off them. So, for someone like me, who was prescribed Sertraline, with shall we say an already addictive personality, that would only make me feel better for a short period of time. Once I would try to wean myself off, I’d find myself with another problem, dependence. If that makes sense? I understand in conditions like dementia and psychosis people may need to take medicine to make them better, but again the consequences of taking the medications may lead to severe side effects.

Jerome: How do you think mental health services can best help promote recovery, which is said to be the goal of many services?

Chantelle: More availability for recovery. I think due to ongoing situations within the world people are going to need to use mental health services a lot more than people did before the Covid-19 pandemic, This is going to result in more of a demand for mental health services. On another note, I think mental health services can best help promote recovery, by guiding an individual to gain an understanding of why, an individual’s mental health problems arose in the first place? If you allow yourself to

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3 understand the psychology behind your mental health problems and your lifestyle, they become  
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5 easier to deal with. Well they did for me...  
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10 Jerome: Have you been inspired by any mental health or healthcare professionals you have come  
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12 across?  
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14 Chantelle: Apart from Bob Morrissey, you. You once gave a speech to my class back in year one. You  
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16 were informing us of your background and your work as a clinical psychologist. You said clinical  
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18 psychology was hard to get into. I ran with that. As I said before, I do not really know where my future  
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20 career will lead to, but at this current moment in time I am aiming for the title of a clinical psychologist.  
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22 As an individual who has previously suffered from mental health problems. I want to show people that  
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24 you can turn your life around, no matter how bad it gets. All you need is sheer determination and  
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26 perseverance and if that is not part of your persona, then maybe I could guide them to change their  
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28 mindset. If I can do it, anybody can.  
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34 Jerome: In terms of people with lived experience of mental health problems, have any specific  
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36 individuals impressed you?  
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39 Chantelle: There have been a few. Just to see someone battling with a mental health problem and  
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41 surviving is impressive. I am admiring of people who live with psychosis. To be disconnected from the  
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43 world in which you live, must be extremely hard to deal with. Imagine having to live a life where you  
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45 do not know yourself. You are you, but not you. A voice in your head tries to convince you to do things  
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47 you do not want to do. Not knowing the difference between real life visions and hallucinations. The  
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49 thought of living with such condition. People who suffer from psychosis coming to think about it  
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51 inspire me the most. I would like to help people who suffer from this illness.  
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57 Jerome: What challenges lie ahead for you? What do you most want to achieve in the future?  
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Chantelle: My biggest challenge is me. I know that change comes with time. Change is a work in progress and with that, the effort must be put into it for it to work. I know I will hurdle every obstacle that comes before me, if I do not do it the first time, which luckily up to now has been the case, then I will keep trying until I get to where I want to be. University has opened many doors for me, so I am excited for what the future holds. I do not want much, I am not a greedy person, however, I do want to be comfortable in every aspect of my future life and to be fair, I would have earned it. But if my kids aspire to be like me, then my job is done. I never had a good mum as a role model. My children will not be able to say the same about me. That is for sure!

Jerome: What would you most like to be remembered for?

Chantelle: It was only when I discovered what psychology was and then applied it to my life to gain an understanding of past events, that I was able to bring about change within my own life, my behaviour, the way I viewed things and my feelings. I would most like to be remembered for helping people bring about change in their lives. Some are already inspired by me. I'd like to keep that going. I have many people who say how do you it, "You're superwoman? I wish I could do it," I reply with the same answer every time. If you want something bad enough, you will do anything in your power to make sure that happens and if you do not, then you do not want it bad enough. When I first started University back in 2016, I remembered thinking, people like me do not belong in places like this. It had to be attraction because I had no other explanation. Then it dawned on me. I am here because I wanted to be here. I made it here through my hard work, perseverance and dedication. I know now that my uniqueness as an individual will benefit my career in certain ways. I look forward to that.

## Conclusion

I thought lockdown was difficult. Really? In truth, I have never had to struggle the way Chantelle has. There are few of us who have ever faced difficulties like these. Some people stood out for Chantelle. Laura O'Brien. Bob Morrisey. Most importantly her father. Her greatest desire is to fulfil her potential, and to be a role model for her children. It is indeed humbling to be in the presence of a woman like Chantelle.

## Reference.

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## About the authors.

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